

OUT OF TIME

Issue No. 21

Out of Control--Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners

January 1994

LETTER FROM CHOWCHILLA PWA

Joann Walker is one of several prisoners at Chowchilla Women's Prison taking action to improve health care for prisoners and to call attention to the abuse and medical neglect faced by the women there. She wrote the following open letter to people on the outside in hopes of mobilizing support for women prisoners and to pressure the prison administration to respond to their demands.

I am an incarcerated Person With AIDS (PWA) at the Central California Women's Facility at Chowchilla (CCWF). I have been in and out of prison, this is not bragging. It is really shameful that it took me 43 years and AIDS to wake up!

The California Penal System treats HIV/AIDS as if it is a crime! HIV/AIDS is an illness and should be treated the same way that cancer is treated. When an incarcerated person has cancer, the system responds medically with little or no hesitation. The HIV/AIDS incarcerated person has to fight the system for every little thing we get! Mind you, we are not asking for anything extra for PWAs, just good medical care.

The system has a knack of giving a little and holding back a lot, and they do this in the name of justice! Yes, we were given a Peer Counseling Program, we are also allowed to educate others. But what happened to the diets, that are essential to the health of HIV/AIDS persons? Why aren't T-cell counts done on time? Why are we forced to work in the yard in the cold weather that causes colds for healthy people and PCP (pneumocystis carinii pneumonia) for PWAs?

It is ironic that the system would rather spend \$24,000 to house a PWA for 24 days than give her early release. That is what is happening to Deborah Paul. On November 14, her mother passed and she has only 24 days left to serve on her prison term. Instead of letting this PWA go home a little early to her five children who need her, the system put yet another burden upon this suffering family. The family had to pay \$500 for Deborah Paul to leave prison for a few hours to attend the funeral and say goodbye to her mother. It cost \$32.00 an hour for each officer at time and a half, \$5.50 for their breakfasts, \$7.50 for their lunches, \$17.00 for their dinners, and last but not least, \$.24 per mile for the round trip. Taxpayers could be saving quite a bundle if the system would show some compassion.

This kind of action brings on stress which is the number one killer of incarcerated PWAs. But the system knows this! Like I said before, this is murder by proxy. The California Penal System is one of the TOP TEN killers of PWAs.

Look at the case of Betty Jo Ross. At this time, Betty is being housed at an outside hospital. She has been given a prognosis of less than six months to live. She is suffering from Micobacterium Avium Complex (MAC), AIDS related dementia, CMV retinitis, and she was just denied early release by James Gomez, the Director of the California Department of Corrections (CDoC). Over 1,000 women prisoners signed a petition demanding Betty Jo's release and medical staff made the same recommendation. It is outrageous that the taxpayers have to spend tens of thousands of dollars to keep Betty Jo Ross incarcerated when she has a loving mother willing to care for her during her last days on earth.

What about incarcerated PWAs. The talk shows and the media only like to interview the rich or the "innocent." We have a story to tell, a story that should be heard around the world. A story worse than Watergate about the false face of justice within the California Penal System. About the mismanagement of your tax dollars within the California Penal System. About the unprofessional conduct of state employees. About the disrespect that incarcerated persons suffer at the hands of some, not all. The wrongdoers outweigh the ones who put their all into being professional in their job performance.

Does anyone out there care? If not about the HIV/AIDS incarcerated persons what about your tax dollars? The word "human" used to mean a lot to me. Are there any humans left or has everyone been cloned?

MEDICAL NEGLECT AT CHOWCHILLA---DEMO JAN. 29

by Jennie / LAGAI

As a reader of Out of Time, you are probably aware of the many ways that prisoners are degraded, neglected and abused. This is especially true when it comes to health care (or the lack of it). Joann Walker's description of conditions for women prisoners in general and those with HIV in specific are not unusual. What is unusual is the fact that over 1,000 prisoners in Chowchilla risked possible punishment and signed a petition demanding the "compassionate release" of Betty Jo Ross, a prisoner dying of AIDS who has requested to spend her last days with her mother and four children. And in response to their activism, as well as pressure from outside, Betty Jo was finally released just last week, after being repeatedly denied.

In addition, a group of prisoners inside Chowchilla Women's Prison have been active for quite some time, trying to get the prison administration to respond to the basic health needs of the prisoners there. (Chowchilla is the largest prison for women in the state of California. It is located north of Fresno and houses over 3,000 women, about 100 of whom are known to be HIV+.)

These women need the active support of those of us on the outside who can help draw public attention to the conditions at Chowchilla and put our own pressure on the prison administration. Anyone who has done prison support work knows that one of the main reasons prisons get away with the shit they pull is because "nobody is watching" and prisoners as a group are some of the most politically powerless people in society. But by drawing public attention to the conditions at Chowchilla and highlighting the efforts of the women inside, we can make a difference. (Some of the most profound changes in prison policies around the country have come as a result of the "shame" cast on prison administrators by prisoners and their advocates who have exposed unjust practices and rallied some kind of public support.)

That's why the Coalition to Support Women Prisoners at

Chowchilla, in coordination with the prisoner-activists inside, have called for a demonstration at the prison on Saturday, **January 29, 1994 at noon.** Activists across a wide range of issues, from ACT UP to women's health to prisoner support (even supporters of Ellie Nesler, who has breast cancer), will mobilize from Northern, Southern and Central California and rally to support the women prisoners in Chowchilla. Specifically, we will demand:

- Quality health care for all women prisoners. Health care is a right, and women in prison should not be subjected to humiliation, neglect, inaccurate diagnoses, untrained staff, inadequate equipment and treatment.

- Hire an HIV/AIDS specialist. The fact that prisoners with HIV/AIDS are diagnosed and treated by technicians with no specialized training is outrageous!

- High nutritional diets and vitamin supplements for HIV+ prisoners. Women with HIV/AIDS need food and other dietary supplements to help their immune systems. This is a basic treatment strategy for people living with HIV/AIDS!

- Compassionate release for all terminally ill prisoners.

- Support prisoner-initiated peer education efforts. Peer education is one of the most important ways people with HIV/AIDS can learn about how to maintain their health and develop strategies for living with HIV/AIDS. It also breaks down myths about HIV and its transmission, which helps prevent both unsafe practices and AIDS bigotry.

The organizers of the demonstration realize there is substantial time and distance involved in participating in this event. But the issues at stake really are about life and death. A solid show of public support for the women inside could have a dramatic impact on the policies and practices that affect them every day!

For more information, or to get involved in organizing the demo, contact the Coalition in Support of Women Prisoners in Chowchilla, (415) 861-4058, or (510) 530-6214.

Chasing Susan and Kathy:

How the fbi Invaded Us in the 70s

by Bo

On September 15, 1993, after living underground for 23 years, Kathy Powers turned herself into the fbi. There has been much noisy speculation as to what would motivate anyone to turn themselves in to the fbi, but for this article we will try not to be judgmental. We will try for a herstorical look at how the fbi used the hunt for Kathy Powers and her lover Susan Saxe to infiltrate and spy on the lesbian community. This fbi mission was one of the first that was not purely a response to the sexual "deviance" of the community, but as a response to the progressive politics of the community. Radical Lesbian politics of the early 70's included support for the Black Panthers and their community programs, support for the independence of Puerto Rico, involvement in the anti-war movement, struggles for women's rights, sovereignty of Indigenous people through support of groups like AIM, as well as many community projects like clinics and schools. Of course GAA (gay activists alliance) and some lesbian groups had formed too.

It was September 23, 1970 when the bank robbery went down. The first police to arrive was fatally wounded at the scene. Kathy Powers was not at the scene and had nothing to do with the shooting. She was a getaway driver in a second car. The \$26,000 was to be used to melt down wheels on military trains carrying weapons into Viet Nam and to secure arms for the Black Panthers.

1970 was the year that saw a split in the anti-war movement that resulted in some groups going underground to attempt armed struggle in response to the u.s. increasing violence at home as well as in Viet Nam. That March, three members of the Weathermen blew themselves up in a Greenwich Village townhouse where they were building bombs. A army math research center at the university of wisconsin in Madison was bombed. Then the u.s. military invaded Cambodia after lying for months about air strikes in that country. Black students were shot down at Jackson State, Mississippi. Then in early May, four students at Kent State, Ohio were murdered by the national guard during a peaceful protest focused on the recent invasions. These incidents sparked national student protests in colleges and high schools where students walked out. A national committee was set up at Brandeis that included Susan Saxe and Kathy Powers as well as some convicts in a school release program. There were a few of these school release programs around the country at the time but they were short lived as convicts tend to lean more towards an action lifestyle and that combined with angry student activists proved too much for the state to control.

After the robbery Kathy and Susan got away and went underground: traveling around the country via lesbian communities where they would be comfortable and blend. The fbi was pissed and had one of their massive reactions to the illusive lovers. They employed a series of sneak tactics that included spys, payoffs, and several grand juries across the country.

Between 1970-75 the lesbian community was hit hard as the feds searched for any potential lead. Among the grand jury casualties was Jill Raymond; reported to be a lover of Susan Saxe. She took a political stand and refused to testify. The fbi ran to her grandmothers house in Seattle to tell that Jill was a lesbian and probably threatened more of the same. But Jill was strong and continued to refuse to testify. She did 18 months in some funky jail for being an honorable dyke. Thank you Jill Raymond for your leadership.

Often the fbi would target lesbians with children and threaten them with loss of the family if they did not testify. They sent agents to women's land across the country whenever they heard of such land. One woman remembers how

the fbi showed up on the land where she lived with five others in missouri in 1974 or 75. The feds came out of the blue and asked a series of questions about Susan Saxe. Finally one agent got it together to ask "would you tell us if you had seen her?" The woman responded NO and the feds went away that time.

In eugene, oregon the local tv played a fbi film about Powers and Saxe that depicted them as hiding in the womins community by using false identity and accused them of being armed and dangerous criminal terrorists. Of course, the fbi sought cooperation from that community and many others by coercion and infiltration.

fbi trained agents came around several places. One team consisted of two women who seemed to be lovers and a man who seemed to be gay. They were known to enter a community, set up a print shop to help deal with the overwhelming amount of literature that an activist community can produce. They would offer assistance in order to have access to data as well as to worm their way into the trust of that community in hopes of learning the gossip that might include mention of Saxe or Powers or others who were at large. Eventually they were found out and exposed. About five years later this same trio turns up in the pacific northwest doing the same infiltration thing. Fortunately some dyke remembered them from the east and they were exposed and confronted by a local loose lesbian coalition who came together for just this purpose.

Susan Saxe was found in philadelphia in 1975 and served 8 years in framingham women's prison, mass. Kathy Powers was on the fbi most wanted list for 14 years until she was taken off in 84 because there were no new leads. The fbi didn't have a clue. Nine years later Kathy turns herself in and even tho she made a deal for 5 years, she got 12 years from the state of mass plus 5 concurrent from the feds; after which she will be on parole for 20 years. She can never go public with her story in either film or writing--- if she does, it's an automatic life sentence (is this another version of the son of sam law that was overturned by the supreme kourt?)

Kathy says she was a product of the times and here is a small piece of her statement:....." the answer lies in the deep and violent crisis that the Vietnam war created in our land. At that time, the law was being broken everywhere: at the very top, where an intransigent president defied international law as well as the express intentions of congress; in government services, where daniel ellsberg leaked the pentagon papers in the hope that citizen scrutiny could hasten an end to the war; among the clergy, where priests and nuns destroyed draft records; in neighborhoods where young men denied the draft.....the illegal acts that i committed arose, not from any desire for personal gain, but from a deep philosophical and spiritual commitment that if a wrong exists, one must take an active role to stop it, regardless of the consequences to oneself in comfort or security....."

It is important to note that every main stream media article carries a few words and photos of other "campus radicals" from the '70s. Of course these chosen ones, are for the most part, dead or working and living some sorta acceptable life. Some of them did no time and this has to be attributed to their white skin privilege as well as their class background. It is important to be aware that none of these so called mass media rags mentions the almost 200 political prisoners and prisoners of war in u.s. prisons right now. Just another media white wash!

If anyone has anymore herstory or clarification they wood like to add to this article, it wood be appreciated. We can't remember it all and to begin to trace this herstory requires more time than any of us has at this time.

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN CAMPAIGN --- LONDON

Justice For Women is a volunteer feminist organization set up to campaign against discrimination within the legal system towards women subjected to male violence.

There are three goals: 1. to monitor and raise awareness around the response of the criminal justice system to male violence 2. to publicize and challenge the outcome of specific cases where women or children who have suffered male violence have been unfairly treated, or the courts have failed to deal effectively and adequately with violent men. 3. to campaign for changes in the law so that it recognizes and takes seriously women's experiences of male violence.

Current focus is domestic violence, particularly the treatment of women who have killed their violent husbands/partners. One case of particular concern is that of EMMA HUMPHREYS whose been down for eight years. Emma was 17 years old when she killed her batterer boy friend pimp with one stab wound to the chest. Emma comes from a family with deep history of alcohol and abuse. She ran away at 16 and ended up living with a client who was even worse. He was extremely possessive and controlling as well as sexually and physically abusive. Emma was gang-raped and attempted suicide. Her mother has called the police insisting that they check up on her daughter because she feared for her life.

At the time of arrest Emma was in shock and speechless so the police did their usual uncaring construction of a statement for her. There were no women officers present and Emma received no counselling during her 11 months on remand. The police statement omitted the history of violence and abuse.

If you want to join the campaign to free Emma, write and/or send money to Justice for Women c/o 55, Rathcoole Gdns. London N8 9NE.

TEXAS: WOMEN'S CONTROL UNIT

On November 25, 1993 Ana Lucia Gelabert and other "troublesome" women within the TDC were sent to the hobby unit at marlin, tx. This was previously an all male prison so verbal and physical mistreatment are considered business as usual. Now ain't that an insightful excuse!

Women are daily called "bitches" and "dykes" by guards. When Cathy "CAT" Oger talked back to a verbally abusive guard, she was body slammed to the floor and dragged off to segregation. She was named "white bull dagger bitch" by the pig perpetrator.

Women can be viewed continually while showering and shitting. There is no privacy from prying male guards who gawk and enter all areas unannounced. On Nov 28 a woman was strip searched in the wide open yard.

Women are allowed very little in the way of warm clothing and are forced to stand for long periods of time outside waiting in line for medication, work, etc.

Guards are telling the women they are in a real prison now and will be treated accordingly. Is this another twist to the tired old line about -- so you want to be a man?

The women inside ask that you contact: 1. governor ann richards (who is a democrat for women's rights) State Capital, Austin, Tx 78711 2. TDC director james a. collins Huntsville, tx 77340 3. hobby unit warden james h. byrd, rt 2, box 600, marlin, tx 76661 4. atty general dan moraks, box 12548, austin, tx 78711.

To be in direct contact with the women write: Ana Lucia Gelabert #384484 -- hobby, rt 2, box 600, marlin, tx 76661. Also the women are asking for legal assistance and support from any texas women's groups.

NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR BATTERED WOMEN

4,000,000 women a year in the u.s. are victims of severe assaults by boyfriends and husbands, and about 1 in 4 women is likely to be abused by a partner in her lifetime.

When women kill, it is usually in their own defense and battering is usually present. When women kill they are more likely than men to be responding to, rather than initiating violence.

The female prison population tripled in the 1980's. Three quarters of imprisoned women are mothers, and the vast majority of them are their families' main wage earners. Two thirds of female prisoners have children under the age of 18.

For the past six years The National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women has worked to increase justice for battered women charged with crimes across the country. They have developed a network of programs and people who will work with survivors of abuse who are imprisoned or facing criminal charges.

The Clearinghouse also has : -- provided resources to over 8,400 battered women and/or their advocates -- given technical assistance to defense team members in 720 cases nationally -- participated in 53 professional training programs -- and continues to build a national network of supporter and advocates

please send donations or seek information: National Clearinghouse for the Defense of battered Women -- 125 S. 9th street, suite 302 -philadelphia, pa 19107.

NEW YEARS HITS

(or how parole boards ended 1993)

LEONARD PELTIER received no justice from the federal parole board when they gave him a 15 year hit. Leonard has been down for more than 20 years and has world wide focus as a political prisoner in the u.s. and is recognized by Amnesty International. More than 2 million petition signatures & 50 u.s. congress people, and a film by robert redford (Incident at Olgala) have brought attention to this most gross perversion by the just-us department. Not only is this case reflective of the government's true policy towards Native People, it seems that they want Leonard to become the longest held political prisoner in the world.

SUNDIATAACOLI received a 20 year hit from new jersey for the same turnpike incident that gave Assata Shakur her life sentence. Sundiata has already done 20 so the message is clearly a death wish from the parole board. Could it be that they still want revenge for the death of their officer who opened fire? Or could it be that they still want revenge for Assata's liberation from prison, and continuing asylum in Cuba? Or could it just be that parole boards' true function for political prisoners is to seek REVENGE?????

We send strength for the continuing perseverance of these two brothers.

***** NORMA JEAN CROY *****

The state of california attorney general's office was granted yet another extension before replying to the Writ of Habeas filed a few months ago in federal kourt in sacramento. Hopefully they will be replying by January 14. That is, if they can not find a way to seek another extension. Once the state has filed it's response, "Norm"s attorneys will be seeking a hearing so that new evidence that came to light during Hooty's trail can be produced. This will result in a request for a new trial on the original 1978 case.

Norma Jean's case is beyond ridiculous by now since the state is holding her for a crime they have admitted (in Hooty's appeal) did not happen. Hopefully the attorney generals office can figure this out and dismiss or refuse to retry or credit time served or some other benevolent maneuver. However, they can choose to continue to be the masters of unreason.

For more info: NJC Defense committee :Pier 5, SF, Ca, 94111

Montana Native American Woman Again Denied Parole

Diane Bull Coming is serving a 40-year prison sentence for robbery as a result of a 1986 plea agreement. Her court appointed public defender made the agreement with both the state and county prosecutors in exchange for Diane's testimony against her co-defendants, Lester and Vernon KillsOnTop, who received the death penalty in the beating death of Marty Etchemendy in 1986. Etchemendy was a white man who drank at Indian bars and with whom all five of the accused were acquainted.

The other female companions in this case received minimum and suspended sentences on federal charges despite their refusal to cooperate with authorities. Diane's court appointed attorney accepted a position with the Custer County prosecutor's office less than 2 weeks after her sentencing. She has been without benefit of an attorney since her sentencing in 1987 and has filed her sentence reviews and appeals herself.

Diane was raped by a Custer County jailer soon after her arrest in 1986. Despite the assistance of a Rosebud County sheriff deputy, who helped Diane request an investigation, and then the subsequent FBI investigation, no charges were filed against the jailer. Etchemendy's father-in-law serves in a high ranking position in the FBI. The Rosebud County sheriff deputy was demoted for his assistance to Diane, a "notorious Indian woman."

Two years ago, while in personal recovery in prison, Diane filed charges against this jailer, with the aid of the Montana Defenders Project at the University of Montana School of Law. This case is proceeding.

Also while in prison, Diane received a paralegal degree and

completed 3 semesters of college, majoring in psychology and chemical dependency counseling. Since her transfer to a pre-release center in October 1993, she has received a WordPerfect computer certification. She assisted the ACLU in the filing of a class action lawsuit against the Montana women's prison for inhumane living conditions, arbitrary prescription of drugs to control inmates, inadequate medical and mental health services and lack of training and education programs.

In November 1993, Diane was able to go to the school of her son, to look into a bullying incident, which was making him withdraw severely and not participate in classes. Diane was able to speak with the principal and several teachers about the incident and resolve it. She was invited to come back to conduct a cultural class for Native American children, on a regular basis. When she gains parole she is looking forward to doing this.

She is on annual review by the parole board; has just been refused for the second time, the board citing letters from law enforcement officials who complained that she is a grave danger to the community.

Currently, the pre-release Life Skills Center to which she has been assigned, is under threat of losing its funding by the state. The 12 women who are able to cook and care for themselves and receive daily counseling, are working hard to increase awareness about the value of these centers and open more of them.

In Oakland, there is one center of this kind, Mandela House, which helps Mothers who have survived crack study living skills. The funding is up in the air on this one, too, no thanks to the lock-em-all-up-&-throw-the-key-away campaigners. More info and contact address in next issue.

SPARKS FLY AGAIN OCTOBER 29th

The 4th Annual Sparks Fly Event, celebrating International Day of Solidarity with women political prisoners was a major success. Women Against Imperialism and Out of Control combined their efforts to produce this event. Over 200 people crowded into the Harriet Tubman room at the Women's Building for this exciting evening. Although the heat was stifling, spirits soared throughout the program.

African American singer/songwriter Melanie De More began the program with her creative, original soulful sounds.

Native American poet and activist, Chrystos, read from Vanishing and Dream On as well as In Her I am (a new book of erotica).

Lastly novelist Dorothy Allison read from her latest work in progress. Allison is the author of the best selling novel Bastard Out of Carolina.

We're lucky to know these creative lesbian artists who will donate their time and energy to supporting women political prisoners.

Thank you again Melanie, Chrystos and Dorothy.

Thanks to the overwhelming support from the S.F. lesbian community Sparks Fly raised close to \$1000 for commissary and phone coupons for women political prisoners and Prisoners of War across the country. This monetary evidence only further proves to the prisoners that they are not forgotten and that there is political awareness and strength in this community.

SILVIA RUN

Due to the initiatives of the weekly magazine "Avenimenti" and the Marathon Club of Rome, hundreds of Italian citizens participated in the New York marathon to send a message demanding Silvia Baraldini's return to Italy.

Two hundred Italians ran in the New York Marathon wearing T-shirts that read "I run for Silvia" and held a "Breakfast Run" on Saturday morning. Among them was two-time marathon winner, Orlando Pizzolato.



Runners for Silvia in N.Y. Marathon/93.

LAGAI/OOC
3543--18th St., Box #26
San Francisco, CA 94110

Ann The Spirit
P.O. Box 57584
Jackson Stn.
Hamilton
CANADA

Ontario
L8P 4X3